Better Than

One

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/betterthanone0000knig

Better Than One

Better Than One

Damon Knight
and
Kate Wilhelm

Noreascon II
Boston
1980

COPYRIGHT © 1980 BY DAMON KNIGHT AND KATE WILHELM.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL MEANS INCLUDING INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE PUBLISHER, EXCEPT BY A REVIEWER WHO MAY QUOTE BRIEF PASSAGES IN A REVIEW.

FIRST EDITION

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO. 79-89652

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BOOK NO. 0-9603146-0-1

Acknowledgments

"Semper Fi," by Damon Knight, © 1964 by The Condé Nast Publications, Inc; originally published (as "Satisfaction") in *Analog*, August 1964.

"Baby, You Were Great," by Kate Wilhelm, ©1967 by Damon Knight; originally published in *Orbit 2*.

"The Eagle," by Kate Wilhelm, © 1979 by Kate Wilhelm.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Contents

Two Introductions

Damon Knight vii
Kate Wilhelm xi

Three Poems

Exorcism 3
Epithalamium 4
Elegy 5

Two Stories

Introduction 8
Semper Fi 11
Introduction 36
Baby, You Were Great 41

Four Poems

Alternatives 69
Four Seasons 71
No One Listens 74
The Eagle 76

Introduction

by Damon Knight

I FIRST MET KATE Wilhelm in 1959, when she came at my invitation to the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference, an eight-day gathering that Judy Merril and I were running in Milford, Pennsylvania. It was a cold, grey weekend in June, but Kate had come out of Kentucky and was flushed from the sun. She had never met any writers before and was apprehensive about the whole thing—with good reason, because we tore her story apart and stomped on it in the workshop a couple of days later. She spent that afternoon throwing stones in the Delaware, but came back dead game and stomped a story of Ted Cogswell's in turn. (Ted Thomas remarked, with a look of

amazement, "Our little pink and white Katie has blown her cork.")

Both of us were married to other people at the time, but a year or so later both marriages fizzled definitively and Kate let me talk her into this and that. It was not terrifically easy for either of us, because we both had children—Kate two boys, I a boy and two girls. We sorted it all out eventually, and we were married in my house with a large attendance of Milford writers—Richard McKenna gave the bride away, Carol Emshwiller was the matron of honor, Avram Davidson was my best man, and Ted Thomas performed the ceremony. (In Pennsylvania you don't have to have a preacher.)

I know for sure that at least one friend of ours gave us six months at the outside. For one thing, there is a superstition that writers should not marry each other (too competitive, neurotic, etc.), and for another I was an old man of forty-one, twice married and divorced, who obviously wanted One Thing from Kate. (There was a little truth in this.) As it turned out, we were as comfortable together in every way as if we had been designed for the purpose. In my previous experience married people after the first few years did not have much to say to each other; Katie and I have never run out of things to talk about. It is well

known that I am one of the most sarcastic, intolerant, opinionated sons of bitches in science fiction, but Katie and I get along because she doesn't take any nonsense from me. We have always been fans of each other's work; the problem of competition or envy has never arisen. (Except, now I come to think of it, that Katie gets fan letters that say, "Your story changed my life," and I get little scrawls asking, "Why did you write that?") We concluded after one disastrous experiment that we could not collaborate, and we are too cautious to show each other unfinished work, but we always discuss it and criticize it afterward. We have worked together for years at the Milford Conference, and at the Clarion Workshop and other workshops, and in my opinion we make a hell of a team.

By the time this book is published we will have been married seventeen years. Between us we have published over eighty books and I forget how many short stories. We have lived in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Florida, and now we live in Oregon. I am the one who was born here, but Katie, who visited the state for the first time in 1973, is the one who feels she has always belonged in Oregon. Eugene, where we live now, is a friendly college town of about 100,000, large enough to be brimming with culture, but small

enough to feel like a community. Eugene has a certain amount of harmless lunacy that spills over from California, and because of the university it is a cosmopolitan town; among our friends now we number an Indian from India, an Iranian, a Nisei from Hawaii, etc.

It rains here instead of snowing, and spring comes in February. (Katie used to bitch like hell in Pennsylvania when April came and it was still winter.) Oregonians are honest, friendly, nature-loving and sympathetic—a big difference from the hostile, suspicious, costive and clannish Easterners we were used to. We still have too damn many kids and cats in a house that is never big enough no matter how we expand it, but we are surviving. In our fenced half-acre Katie grows beans, peas, squash, tomatoes, broccoli, corn and other vegetables, and she has planted fruit trees, grapes and berries. Well, you know, it could be worse.

Introduction

by Kate Wilhelm

So what is it really like for two writers to live together? Let me describe a perfect day.

Up at 7 or a little after to see that Jon has breakfast and leaves in time for school. From 8 to 9, poke around, water house plants, make a shopping list, drink coffee. Nine to ten, start thinking about the story I'm working on, turn up the thermostat in my office. D. gets up somewhere in this period. Not much talk in the AM. Go to work, stay until noon or the mail comes. Get something very nice—a letter praising something I've written, a fat check, an offer to publish something out of print, etc. Compare mail and find that D. has got something similar. Eat a sandwich, drink

milk, go back to work until 2 or 2:30. Realize I've written 8-10 pages that don't need a thing done to them. Put on old shoes and go out to work in garden. In at four, shower, drink wine and read newspaper until dinner, which is superb, with the family all cheerful and without problems. After dinner, play music, maybe play chess with D., read, discuss the absurdity of Henry James's most famous pieces, make vacation plans or other plans, read some more. Eventually go to bed. Perfect day. And they happen, but, my God, are they rare.

What I'll settle for is a day when I wake up to find half the bedcovers on my side of the bed, on me, and not on the floor on Damon's side. I'd be satisfied with any day that the telephone did not ring a dozen times, none of them for me, or, if for me, wanting me to do something. And I'd love it if junk mail were outlawed forever, along with requests from people for one or the other of us to contribute our time to write essays for their books, and students' letters asking for our life history, philosophy of writing, or at least essay answers to the attached list of 25 questions. And I wish no one ever had to go to the dentist, or take a car to the garage, or a cat to the vet, or a child out shopping for shoes. I wish someone would pick up and put away all the books scattered throughout the house.

I don't want to do it. Most of these things get done, laundry gets done, the boy has shoes.

Sometimes when I know the morning output has to be scrapped, or if it's bogged down and I have lost faith, I don't want to talk, and I can't bear it if he's cheerful. If he's glum and moody and in a kick-the-cat mood, I try to scowl a lot just to keep him company. If we're both down at the same time, people come in and start looking for the corpse we're mourning. Frequently one or the other of us will say, "Oh, right, tell me about it." It's possible that we're too proud of each other's triumphs.

He's my ideal reader. I hand him something out of the typewriter on yellow paper, full of corrections and inserts, and then pretend a nonchalance about the time it takes him to read it, and what his attitude will be. Since I can't talk about my work ahead of time, it's always a surprise to him. I respect his judgment. The most any writer can hope for is to please his or her ideal reader; others will like it or not and it doesn't really matter.

When he finishes something I read it first. We do listen quite intently to what the other is saying. I was very depressed after reading his novel *The World and Thorinn* because it made me aware again of the magic he can work with words.

He edits everything: paperbacks, hardcovers, the

newspaper . . . I think it's his way of saying *Kilroy was here*. It is sometimes disconcerting to pick up a book and discover that he was there first. I dread the day a visiting writer picks up a copy of his or her book and finds he was there first.

Sometimes a woman will ask in all sincerity: How can you stand having him in the house all the time? I think we've developed a signalling system that we both understand and are sensitive to. Signs that mean *leave me alone for now, I'm furious, I'm working, are you free?*, and so on. The house is jointly held, but each of us has an office that is out of bounds to the rest of the family. It is hard to make the kids remember to keep out because their emergencies are always so immediate, but we can cope with that as long as each of us knows the other will respect that closed door.

Our kids don't see our lives as too onerous. Not a single one of them wants a regular job, and they don't seem to have much understanding of the distinctions many others still make about *his* sphere of work and *her* sphere of work. What they see is two adults doing pretty much the same work all the time. They like living at home, in fact, to the extent that I often think, here we all are, growing old together.

But, as Damon says, it could be worse.

Poems by Knight

Exorcism

Over the chancel, as luck would have it,
Three cranes are roosting in the belfry steeple.
Birds of evil aspect and omen,
Who foul with their droppings rope, gear and people.

Though shouts fail to move them
As they brood out of reach,
Still the Church is defended
By three bells, one to each.

Then pull with a will,
Swing them high, let them fall.
Hear them peal, as they fly:
Bale, bel, baal.

Epithalamium

One morning an unusual case carried in by stretcher:
Two bodies fallen, crushed, blood-spattered
  and broken,
Awe in every eye, not a word spoken,

For the medical students were quite unable to say
Where one's flesh ceased and became the other's skin,
Or where surgery should begin.

At last the surgeon rose and said,
"Whom this fall hath joined, let no man put asunder.
We can only put away our scalpels, and wonder."

Elegy

Standing with toes turned out on the high wire,
Our father which art in heaven,
Pot-bellied in tights, holding a snow shovel for a fan,
Hallowed be thy name.
Eyes hot with resentment in the calcined mask,
Thy kingdom come,
Dreaming of a house in Levittown, and a drive
choked with snow on the first green day,
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
A wife, two possibly retarded children, a novel in work,
Give us this day our daily bread,
Snubs, preferences gone to others, relatives who
spoke an alien tongue,
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,
Pride, courage, and despair moving molehills, he
strode the wire,
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil:
Lost his balance, and fell into unending fire.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen.

Semper Fi

Like other imaginative writers, I am a voyeur at heart; I would love to be able to float invisible in your living room, office, and bedroom. (I wrote about this in "I See You," a story that disturbed some people.)

It would be almost as good, I've always thought, to be able to visualize scenes in such vivid detail that they would be like real experiences, or, at least, like a movie in Panavision and Sensurround. Here I must mention that ordinarily, when I write a story about a daydream, I ask myself, "What's wrong with it?" and let the answer dictate the story. And of course I knew there was something wrong with this one, but generations of science fiction writers had already said that, and the point had seemed so obvious that they had supported it with weak arguments. I thought it might be interesting to refute these arguments and leave the reader to answer the question if she could. "What *is* wrong with it?"

I got my cast of characters from here and there. Price is based on an old friend of mine; we were poor and timid together in the forties. When I saw him again thirty years later he was rich and confident, and I was fascinated to observe that his formerly bitten nails were manicured. For some reason that impressed me more than his two-

hundred-dollar suit, and I knew that he had just given birth to a character.

Diedrich, of course, has a little bit of Billy Graham in him—those hypnotic pale eyes. The rest are from Central Casting.

I think it's interesting that, after all that effort to realize my daydream in fiction, I found I couldn't write it into the story—I had to shove it into the background and let the reader imagine it for himself. (I use the masculine pronoun, for once, because I think most people who have this daydream, or at least those who dream it in this overtly sexual form, are male.)

Now, then, I admit this story is a scam, but I maintain that sexual romance in real life is a scam too—very pleasant, of course (some of the time), but so is my hero's experience "under the wire." And the difference, exactly, is—?

Semper Fi

by Damon Knight

THERE WAS A BRISK little wind up here, flipping the white silk of his trousers like flags against his body, ruffling his hair. Two thousand feet down past the dangling tips of his shoes, he could see the mountains spread out, wave after brilliant green wave. The palace was only a hollow square of ivory, tiny enough to squash between thumb and forefinger. He closed his eyes, drank the air with his body, feeling alive all the way to the tips of his fingers and toes.

He yawned, stretched with pleasure. It was good to get up here sometimes, away from all that marble and red velvet, the fountains, the girls in their gauzy pants . . . There was something

about this floating, this complete solitude and peace.

An insect voice said apologetically, "Pardon me, sir."

He opened his eyes, looked around. There it was, the one he called the "bug footman," three inches of slender body, a face half-human, half insect, wings a blur—flying as hard as it could to stay in one place.

"You're early," he said.

"No, sir. It's time for your therapy."

"That's all I hear from you—time for my therapy."

"It's good for you, sir."

"Well, no doubt you're right."

"I'm sure I'm right, sir."

"Okay. Get lost."

The creature made a face at him, then veered away on the wind and diminished to a drifting speck of light. Gary Mitchell watched it until it was lost against the sunlit green background. Then he tilted lazily in the air, closed his eyes and waited for the change.

He knew to the second when it would happen. "Bing," he said lazily, and felt the world contract suddenly around him. The wind was gone; mountains and sky were gone. He was breathing a

more lifeless air. Even the darkness behind his eyelids was a different color.

He moved cautiously, feeling the padded couch under him. He opened his eyes. There was the same old room, looking so tiny and quaint that he snorted with amusement. It was always the same, no matter how often he came back to it. That struck him so funny that he rolled over, closing his eyes again, shaken with silent laughter.

After a minute he lay back, emptying his lungs with a grunt, then breathing deeply through his nostrils. He felt good, even though his body ached a little. He sat up and stared at the backs of his hands with amused affection. Same old hands!

He yawned hard enough to crack the cartilage in his jaw, then grinned and heaved himself up out of the hollow half-egg-shape of the couch. Wires and tubing trailed from him in all directions. He pulled the cap off his head, breaking it free of the tiny plastic sockets in his skull. He dropped it, let it swing at the end of its cable. He unfastened the monitoring instruments from his chest, pulled off the rest of his gear, and strode naked across the room.

There was a click from the master clock on the control board, and Mitchell heard the water begin to hiss in the bathroom. "Suppose I don't want a

shower?'' he asked the clock. But he did; all according to routine.

He rubbed his palm over the stubble on his cheeks. Maybe he really should try to work out a gadget that would shave him while he was under the wire. A housing fitted to the lower part of his face, feedback to regulate the pressure . . . But the damned thing might be more trouble than it was worth.

Staring at himself in the mirror, he saw a glint of delighted irony come into his eyes. Same old thoughts! He got out the razor and began to shave.

The clock ticked again as he came from the bathroom, and a tray slid out of the conveyor onto the breakfast table. Scrambled eggs, bacon, orange juice, coffee. Mitchell went to the closet, took out pale-blue slacks and shirt, dressed, then sat down and ate, taking his time. The food was food—nourishment; that was about all you could say.

When he was done, he lit a cigarette and sat with half-closed eyes, letting the smoke spurt in two streams from his nostrils. Vague images drifted through his mind; he did not try to capture them.

The cigarette was a stub. He sighed, put it out. As he walked to the door, it seemed to him that the couch and the control panel were staring at him reproachfully. There was something abandoned

and pathetic in the empty egg-shape, the scattered wires. "Tonight," he promised it. He opened the door and stepped through.

Pale, yellow-tinged sunlight came from the big picture window overlooking the East River. The philodendron in the ceramic pot had unfurled another leaf. On the wall across from the window hung an enormous abstraction by Pollock, upside down. Mitchell gave it an ironic grin.

Reports in their orange plastic binders were piled on one side of the long mahogany desk, letters on the other. In the center, on the green blotter, lay a block of soft pine and an open jackknife.

The red light of the intercom was blinking steadily. Mitchell sat down and looked at it for a moment, then touched the button. "Yes, Miss Curtis?"

"Mr. Price wants to know when you'll be available. Shall I tell him to come in?"

"Okay."

Mitchell picked up the top report, glanced at the sketches and diagrams inside, put it down again. He swiveled his chair around, leaned back and gazed sleepily out over the haze-yellowed landscape. A tug was moving slowly up the river, trailing puffs of yellow-white smoke. On the

Queens side, housing units stood like a child's building blocks; sunlight glinted from the tiny rows of windows.

Curious to see all that still here, still growing; on the other side, he had leveled it years ago, filled it in with jungle. There was something quaint about it now, like an old, yellowed snapshot. That was a little disturbing: coming back like this was always like re-entering the past. A faint sense of wrongness . . .

He heard the door click, and turned to see Jim Price with his hand on the knob. Mitchell grinned, waved a hand. "Hello, boy—good to see you. Knock 'em dead in Washington?"

"Not exactly." Price came forward with his heron's gait, folded himself into a chair, twitched, knotted his thin fingers together.

"Too bad. How's Marge?"

"Fine. I didn't see her last night, but she called in this morning. She asked me to ask you—"

"Kids all right?"

"Sure." Price's thin lips compressed; his brown eyes stared earnestly at Mitchell. He still seemed about twenty years old; to look at him, he had not changed since the days when Mitchell-Price, Inc., was an idea and a back room in Westbury. Only the clothes were different—the two-hundred-dollar suit, the perfectly knotted tie. And the

fingernails; once they had been bitten to the quick, now they were manicured and shiny. "Mitch, let's get down to it. How is that deep probe gadget coming?"

"Got Stevenson's report on my desk—haven't looked through it yet."

Price blinked, shook his head. "You realize that project has been dragging on thirty-six months?"

"There's time," Mitchell said lazily. He reached for the knife and the block of wood.

"That's not the way you talked fifteen years ago."

"I was an eager beaver then," Mitchell said. He turned the block in his hands, feeling the little dusty burrs along the unfinished side. He set the blade against one edge, curled off the first long, sensuous shaving.

"Mitch, damn it, I'm worried about you—the way you've changed the last few years. You're letting the business slide."

"Anything wrong with the earnings reports?" Mitchell felt the cut surface with his thumb, turning to gaze out the window. It would be fun, he thought absently, to drift out into that hazy blue sky, over the tops of the toy buildings, still farther out, over the empty ocean . . .

"We're making money, sure," Price's thin voice said impatiently. "On the mentigraph and the

randomizer, one or two other little things. But we haven't put anything new on the market for five years, Mitch. What are we supposed to do, just coast? Is that all you want?"

Mitchell turned to look at his partner. "Good old Jim," he said affectionately. "When are you ever going to loosen up?"

The door clicked open and a dark-haired girl stepped in—Lois Bainbridge, Price's secretary. "Mr. Price, sorry to interrupt, but Dolly couldn't get you on the intercom."

Price glanced at Mitchell. "Push the wrong button again?"

Mitchell looked at the intercom with mild surprise. "Guess I did."

"Anyway," the girl said, "Mr. Diedrich is here, and you told me to tell you the minute—"

"Hell," said Price, standing up. "Where is he, in reception?"

"No, Mr. Thorwald has taken him down to Lab One. He has his lawyer and his doctor with him."

"I know it," Price muttered, prying nervously into his pockets. "Where did I put those damn—Oh, here." He pulled out some notes scrawled in pencil on file cards. "Okay, look, Lois, you phone down and tell them I'll be right there."

"Yes, Mr. Price." She smiled, turned and walked out. Mitchell's mild gaze followed her.

Not a bad-looking girl, as they went. He remembered that he had brought her over to the other side, three or four years ago, but of course he had made a lot of changes—slimmer waist, firmer bust . . . He yawned.

Price asked abruptly,"Do you want to sit in?"

"Want me to?"

"I don't know, Mitch—do you give a damn?"

"Sure." Mitchell got up, draped an arm around the other man's shoulders. "Let's go."

They walked together down the busy corridor. "Listen," Price said, "how long since you've been out for dinner?"

"Don't know. Month or two."

"Well, come out tonight. Marge told me to bring you for sure."

Mitchell hesitated, then nodded. "All right, Jim, thanks."

Lab One was the showcase—all cedar veneer and potted plants, with the egg-shaped mentigraph couch prominently displayed, like a casket in a mortuary. There were half a dozen big illuminated color transparencies on a table behind the couch, to one side of the control board.

Heads turned as they walked in. Mitchell recognized Diedrich at once—a heavy-set pink-and-blond man in his early forties. The ice-blue eyes stared at him. Mitchell realized with a shock

that the man was even more impressive, more hypnotic than he seemed on television.

Thorwald, the lab chief, made the introductions while white-coated technicians hovered in the background. "The Reverend Diedrich—and Mr. Edmonds, his attorney—and of course you know Dr. Taubman, at least by reputation."

They shook hands. Diedrich said, "I hope you understand the terms on which I am here. I'm not looking for any compromise." The pale eyes were intent and earnest. "Your people put it to me that I could attack the mentigraph more effectively if I had actually experienced it. If nothing changes my mind, that's just what I intend to do."

"Yes, we understand that, of *course*, Mr. Diedrich," said Price. "We wouldn't have it any other way."

Diedrich looked curiously at Mitchell. "You're the inventor of this machine?"

Mitchell nodded. "A long time ago."

"Well, what do you think about the way it has turned out—its effect on the world?"

"I like it," said Mitchell.

Diedrich's face went expressionless; he glanced away.

"I was just showing Mr. Diedrich these mentigraph projections," Thorwald said hurriedly, pointing to the transparencies. Two were

landscapes, weird things, all orange trees and brown grass; one was a city scene, and the fourth showed a hill, with three wooden crosses silhouetted against the sky. "Dan Shelton, the painter, did these. He's enthusiastic about it."

"You can actually photograph what goes on in the subject's mind?" Edmonds asked, raising his black eyebrows. "I was not aware of that."

"It's a new wrinkle," Price answered. "We hope to have it on the market in September."

"Well, gentlemen, if you're ready—" Thorwald said.

Diedrich appeared to brace himself. "All right. What do I do? Shall I take my jacket off?"

"No, just lie down here, if you will," Thorwald answered, pointing to the narrow operating table. "Loosen your tie if it will make you more comfortable."

Diedrich got up on the table, his face set. A technician came up behind him with a basket-shaped object made of curved, crisscrossing metal pieces. She adjusted it gently over Diedrich's skull, tightened the wing nuts until it fitted. She took careful measurements, adjusted the helmet again, then pushed eight plungers, one after the other.

Taubman was looking over her shoulder as she removed the helmet. At the roots of Diedrich's hair, eight tiny purple spots were visible.

"This is merely a harmless dye, Doctor," Thorwald said. "All we are doing here is to establish the sites for the electrodes."

"Yes, all right," said Taubman. "And you assure me that none of them is in the pleasure center?"

"Definitely not. You know there is legislation against it, Doctor."

The technician had moved up again. With a small pair of scissors she cut tiny patches of hair from the purple-marked spots. She applied lather, then, with an even smaller razor, shaved the patches clean. Diedrich lay quietly; he winced at the touch of the cool lather, but otherwise did not change expression.

"That's all of that," Thorwald said. "Now, Reverend Diedrich, if you'll sit over here—"

Diedrich got up and walked to the chair Thorwald pointed out. Over it hung a glittering basketwork of metal, like a more complicated and more menacing version of the helmet the technician had used.

"Just a moment," Taubman said. He went over to examine the mechanism. He and Thorwald spoke in low voices for a moment, then Taubman nodded and stepped back. Diedrich sat down.

"This is the only sticky part," Thorwald said.

"But it really doesn't hurt. Now let's just get your head in this clamp—"

Diedrich's face was pale. He stared straight ahead as a technician tightened the padded clamp, then lowered the basket-shaped instrument. Standing on a dais behind the chair, Thorwald himself carefully adjusted eight metal cylinders, centering each over one of the shaved purple patches on Diedrich's skull. "This will be just like a pinprick," he said. He pressed a button. Diedrich winced.

"Now tell me what sensations you feel," said Thorwald, turning to a control panel.

Diedrich blinked. "I saw a flash of light," he said.

"All right, next."

"That was a noise."

"Yes, and this?"

Diedrich looked surprised; his mouth worked for a moment. "Something sweet," he said.

"Good. How about this?"

Diedrich started. "I felt something touch my skin."

"All right. Next."

"Pew!" said Diedrich, turning his face aside. "A terrible smell."

"Sorry. How about this one?"

"I felt warm for a moment."

"Okay, now this."

Diedrich's right leg twitched. "It felt as if it were doubled up under me," he said.

"Right. One more."

Diedrich stiffened suddenly. "I felt—I don't know how to describe it. *Satisfied.*" His cold eyes went from Mitchell to Thorwald. His jaw was set hard.

"Perfect!" Thorwald said, getting down from the platform. He was grinning with pleasure. Mitchell glanced at Price, saw him wiping his palms with a handkerchief.

The cylinders retracted; the technician unfastened the headclamp. "That's all of that," said Thorwald heartily. "You can step down."

Diedrich got out of the chair, his jaw still set. One hand went up to fumble at his skull.

"Pardon me," said Taubman. He parted Diedrich's hair with his fingers and stared at the little gray plastic button, almost flush with the scalp, that had covered one of the purple spots.

Mitchell drifted over to stand beside Price. "Our friend didn't like that jolt in number eight," he murmured. "Careful, boy."

"I know," Price answered in an undertone. Across the room, Thorwald and the technicians had seated Diedrich in another chair and put the

cap on his head. One of the technicians began showing him big sheets of colored pasteboard, while another, a pale young man with big ears, read dials and punched keys at the control console.

"This is a pretty big gamble you're taking, son," Mitchell said. "You know if we just make him mad, he can really smear us. How'd you get so brave?"

Price scowled, shuffled his feet. "Don't bury me yet," he muttered.

A technician was passing vials of scent under Diedrich's nose, one after another.

"Something up your sleeve?" Mitchell asked; but he had lost interest, and did not hear Price's reply. The technicians were walking Diedrich up and down, getting him to bend, raise his arms, turn his head. When they finally let him sit down again, his face was slightly flushed. Mitchell was thinking dreamily that he could use Diedrich on the other side—make a Teutonic knight out of him, noble, humorless and fierce. But reduce him to about half-size . . . that would be funny.

"We won't try to calibrate the emotional responses this time, Mr. Diedrich," Thorwald was saying. "That's more difficult and complicated—it takes quite a while. But you've got enough here to give you a very good idea of the device."

Diedrich put up a hand to feel the cap on his

head, the cluster of wires emerging from the middle of it. "All right," he said grimly. "Go ahead."

Thorwald looked a little worried. He motioned to the technician at the console. "Input one, Jerry." To Diedrich he said, "Just close your eyes, if you will, and let your hands relax."

The man at the console touched a button. An expression of surprise crossed Diedrich's face. His right hand moved spasmodically, then lay still. A moment later he turned his head aside. His jaws made slow chewing motions. Then he opened his eyes.

"Amazing," he said. "A banana—I peeled it and then ate a bite. But—they weren't my hands."

"Yes, of course—that was a recording made by another subject. However, when you learn to use the other circuits, Mr. Diedrich, you can run that through again and change it until they *are* your hands—or make any other changes you like."

Diedrich's expression showed controlled distaste. He said, "I see." Watching him, Mitchell thought, He's going to go home and write a speech that will blister our tails.

"You'll see what I mean in just a moment," Thorwald was saying. "This time there won't be any primary recording—you'll do it all yourself. Just lean back, close your eyes, and imagine some

picture, some scene—"

Diedrich fingered his watch impatiently. "You mean you want me to try to make a picture like those?" He nodded toward the transparencies ranged along the wall.

"No, no, nothing like that. We won't project it, and only you will see what it is. Just visualize a scene, and wherever it seems vague or out of proportion, keep on changing it and adding to it . . . Go ahead, try it."

Diedrich leaned back, closed his eyes. Thorwald nodded to the man at the console.

Price moved abruptly away from Mitchell, strode over to the chair. "Here is something that may help you, Mr. Diedrich," he said, bending close. He looked at the notes in his hand, and read aloud, "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst."

Diedrich frowned; then his face relaxed. There was a long silence. Diedrich began to frown again. After a moment his hands moved spasmodically on the arms of the chair. His jaw muscles lost their tightness; his chin dropped slightly. After another moment he began breathing quickly and shallowly, lips parted.

Taubman stepped over, frowning, and at-

tempted to take his pulse, but Diedrich knocked his hand away. Taubman glanced at Price, who shook his head and put a finger to his lips.

Diedrich's face had turned into a mask of grief. Moisture appeared under his closed eyelids, began to run down his cheeks. Watching him closely, Price nodded to Thorwald, who turned toward the console and made a chopping motion.

Diedrich's tear-filled eyes slowly opened.

"What was it, Mr. Diedrich?" Edmonds asked, bending toward him. "What happened?"

Diedrich's voice was low and hoarse. "I saw—I saw—" His face contorted and he began to sob. He bent over as if in pain, hands clasped so tightly that the fingers turned red and yellow-white in patches.

Price turned away, took Mitchell by the arm. "Let's get out of here," he muttered. In the corridor, he began to whistle.

"Think you're pretty slick, don't you, boy?" Mitchell asked.

Price's grin made him look like a mischievous small boy. "I know I am, old buddy," he said.

There were four of them at dinner—Price and his good-looking red-haired wife; Mitchell, and a girl he had never met before. Her name was Eileen

Novotny; she was slender, gray-eyed, quiet. She was divorced, Mitchell gathered, and had a small daughter.

After dinner they played a rubber of bridge. Eileen was a good player, better than Mitchell; but when he blundered, once or twice, she only gave him a glance of ironic commiseration. She did not talk much; her voice was low and well modulated, and Mitchell found himself waiting for her to speak again.

When the rubber was over, she stood up. "I'm glad to have met you, Mitch," she said, and gave him her warm hand for a moment. "Thank you for a lovely dinner and a nice evening," she said to Marge Price.

"You're not going already?"

"Afraid I have to—my sitter can only stay till eleven, and it will take me a good hour to get up to Washington Heights."

She paused at the door, glancing back at Mitchell. He could well imagine how it might be with this girl—the long walks, the intimate little restaurants, holding hands, the first kiss . . . Price and his wife were looking at him expectantly.

"Good night, Eileen," he said.

After she was gone, Marge brought in some beer

and excused herself. Price settled himself in a relaxer and lit a pipe. Squinting at Mitchell over the bowl, he said mildly, "You might have given the girl a taxi-ride home, old buddy."

"And start all over again? No thanks, old buddy—I've had it."

Price flipped out his match, dropped it into an ashtray. "Well, it's your life."

"So I've always imagined."

Price shifted uncomfortably in the chair. "So I'm a matchmaker," he said, scowling. "Dammit, I don't like to see what's happening to you. You spend more time under the wire than out of it. It isn't healthy, it isn't good for you."

Mitchell grinned and held out a hand. "Indian rassle?"

Price flushed. "All right, all right, I know you work out at the gym every week—you're in good shape physically. That's not what I'm talking about, and you know it damn well."

Mitchell took a long pull at his can of beer. It was lighter and maltier than he liked, but it was cold, at least, and felt good going down his throat. What about a green beer for St. Paddy's day? Give it a suggestion of mint—just a touch . . .

"Say something." Price said.

Mitchell's eyes focused on him slowly. "Hmm. Think Diedrich will stop being a nuisance now?"

Price made a sour face. "Okay, change the subject. Sure, I think Diedrich will stop being a nuisance. We're sending him a complete rig—couch, control board, library of crystals. And he'll take it. He's hooked."

"Dirty trick?" Mitchell suggested.

"No, I don't think so."

"You planted that picture of the three crosses, didn't you? Then, just to make sure, you stepped up and read him a paragraph from the crucifixion scene in Matthew. Pretty foxy."

"Luke," said Price. "Yeah, pretty foxy."

"Tell me something," Mitchell said. "Just for curiosity—How long since you've been under the wire yourself?"

Price looked at his hands, clasped around the pipe-bowl. "Four years," he said.

"How come?"

"Don't like what it does to me." He folded his free hand around the one that held the pipe; his knuckles cracked, one after another.

"Made you twenty million," Mitchell said gently.

"You know I don't mean that." Price unclenched his hands, leaned forward. "Listen, the Pentagon turned down that contract for forty thousand training crystals. They decided they don't like what it does to people, either."

"Keeps them from being eager little beavers," Mitchell said. "My ass aches for the Pentagon."

"What about the contract—does your ass ache for that?"

"You know, James, I don't understand you," Mitchell said. "One minute you're telling me the mentigraph is worse than hashish, heroin, booze and adultery, all put together. The next, you're complaining because we don't sell more of 'em. How do you explain that?"

Price did not smile. "Let's say I'm a worry-wart. You know I keep talking about pulling out—maybe I'll do it some day—but till I do, I'm responsible to the corporation and I'll do my best for it. That's business. When I worry about you, it's friendship."

"I know it, old buddy."

"Maybe I worry about the whole world once in a while, too," Price said. "What's going to happen when everybody's got a private dreamworld? Where's the old Colonial spirit then?"

Mitchell snorted. "Have you ever done any reading about Colonial times? I did some research on it years ago. They used to drink a horrible thing called flip, made out of rum and hard cider, and they'd plunge a hot poker into it to make it froth up. You could tell the drunkards just by seeing who had an apple orchard."

Price swung his legs off the relaxer, put his elbows on his knees. "All right, what about this? You've got it made, haven't you—you can spend half your time in a world where everything is just the way you like it. You don't need that sweet kid that walked out of here half an hour ago—you've got twenty better-looking than her. And they're on call any time. So why get married, why raise a family? Just tell me this—what's going to happen to the world if the brightest guys in it drop out of the baby-making business? What happens to the next generation?"

"I can answer that one too."

"Well?"

Mitchell lifted his beer can in salute, staring at Price over the shiny top. "The hell with them," he said.

Baby, You Were Great

When I read Damon's story, I thought, ah, a world of opium smokers where only those with intense drives can resist the lure of fantasy. That meant very few would be able to resist. And it meant the world would go to hell fast. I wondered, what if the gadget were slightly different? What if the person having an experience could broadcast it and others could feel exactly the same emotions? I was not working consciously with the gadget with the idea of using it, although I thought his people were much nicer than the people who would ultimately control such a thing. Then I put it out of mind, or rather, I did not consciously think of it again.

In the early sixties it was already becoming apparent that many people thought nothing was real unless it was on television. And it was true that people could watch the nightly horror show called Vietnam, while they ate their porkchops and mashed potatoes, and feel nothing at all. I was preoccupied with the meaning of television, with sex symbols and the manipulation of the many by the few, and superstars like Marilyn Monroe whose every move was observed and reported. I was thinking of a woman whose every emotion could be observed and reported, and shared by anyone tuned in. I was thinking of emotional vampires who take in everything, just as black

holes do, and give back nothing—the ice people.

As it happens I seldom work out the rationale for a story until the scenes are all set. I know what has to happen long before I can tell how it could possibly come about. With this story I had begun to see the scenes, work with them, change them, feel what my people were feeling, suffer with them, and I still was not quite sure how anything would work. I knew the early scene with Cindy and the audition had to be an echo of what I never wanted to get into in detail (because I trusted my readers to provide far more details than I could have given them). And I knew the image of a man in a chair, unmoving except for his give-away hands, was the major image of the thing—for me, anyway. Other scenes came to my inner eye and were developed, and experienced, until I felt they worked, and finally I had to face up to the fact that I needed a rationale. And only then did I realize I was modifying Damon's gadget, making it my own, for my own purposes.

There are many similarities in our stories, far more than I was aware of at the time. This is not surprising, since the same material is reworked endlessly in every creative field. The world view of the writer, the writer's interpretation of the events of the story, the truths the writer has found determine what the story will be, not the furnish-

ings. A story is a great deal more than the furnishings within it.

We both went to the principals in our dramas: the inventor/developer of the idea, the exploiter, and a woman who could have saved the protagonist. Damon's inventor is cool, ironic, without passion. Mine is self-identified (correctly) as a stalactite with inner fires that can't break through his stony casing. When Damon's inventor touches the woman's hand, it feels warm, telling us more about him than about her. When my inventor touches the hand of the woman, her hand feels cool and dry, again revealing his condition. Both men are afraid of life itself. Neither can react in a human way with a woman: one withdraws behind a mask of irony and indifference and the other withdraws behind a mask of dedication to work. They are equally doomed and damned.

There are other similarities that I will leave to the readers to uncover. I do want to mention the great difference in the two stories. My story is based on my belief that there are people with daimonic drives that force them to seek power. Even now in today's world wealth alone no longer guarantees great power, but control of other people does. In the world of Damon's story dreaming is a private affair; in mine, if dreams can be controlled, they will be. Who would the

manipulators control if everyone had access to the compleat fantasyland of the gadget? If your slaves are all asleep, you have no slaves. Damon's is a more benign world than mine; it's a world I can't believe in. I do believe in the controllers, the manipulators, the ones driven to seek ever greater power. And that's why the two stories, with superficial likenesses, the same gadget used in different ways, are finally totally different statements.

Baby, You Were Great

by Kate Wilhelm

JOHN LEWISOHN THOUGHT THAT if one more door slammed, or one more bell rang, or one more voice asked if he was all right, his head would explode. Leaving his laboratories, he walked through the carpeted hall to the elevator that slid wide to admit him noiselessly, was lowered, gently, two floors, where there were more carpeted halls. The door he shoved open bore a neat sign, AUDITIONING STUDIO. Inside, he was waved on through the reception room by three girls who knew better than to speak to him unless he spoke first. They were surprised to see him; it was his first visit there in seven or eight months. The inner room where he stopped was darkened, at first glance appearing empty,

revealing another occupant only after his eyes had time to adjust to the dim lighting.

John sat in the chair next to Herb Javits, still without speaking. Herb was wearing the helmet and gazing at a wide screen that was actually a one-way glass panel permitting him to view the audition going on in the next room. John lowered a second helmet to his head. It fit snugly and immediately made contact with the eight prepared spots on his skull. As soon as he turned it on, the helmet itself was forgotten.

A girl had entered the other room. She was breathtakingly lovely, a long-legged honey blonde with slanting green eyes and apricot skin. The room was furnished as a sitting room with two couches, some chairs, end tables and a coffee table, all tasteful and lifeless, like an ad in a furniture trade publication. The girl stopped at the doorway and John felt her indecision, heavily tempered with nervousness and fear. Outwardly she appeared poised and expectant, her smooth face betraying none of her emotions. She took a hesitant step toward the couch, and a wire showed trailing behind her. It was attached to her head. At the same time a second door opened. A young man ran inside, slamming the door behind him; he looked wild and frantic. The girl registered surprise, mounting nervousness; she felt behind

her for the door handle, found it and tried to open the door again. It was locked. John could hear nothing that was being said in the room; he only felt the girl's reaction to the unexpected interruption. The wild-eyed man was approaching her, his hands slashing through the air, his eyes darting glances all about them constantly. Suddenly he pounced on her and pulled her to him, kissing her face and neck roughly. She seemed paralyzed with fear for several seconds, then there was something else, a bland nothing kind of feeling that accompanied boredom sometimes, or too-complete self-assurance. As the man's hands fastened on her blouse in the back and ripped it, she threw her arms about him, her face showing passion that was not felt anywhere in her mind or in her blood.

"Cut!" Herb Javits said quietly.

The man stepped back from the girl and left her without a word. She looked about blankly, her torn blouse hanging about her hips, one shoulder strap gone. She was very beautiful. The audition manager entered, followed by a dresser with a gown that he threw about her shoulders. She looked startled; waves of anger mounted to fury as she was drawn from the room, leaving it empty. The two watching men removed their helmets.

"Fourth one so far," Herb grunted. "Sixteen yesterday; twenty the day before. . . . All no-

thing." He gave John a curious look. "What's got you stirred out of your lab?"

"Anne's had it this time," John said. "She's been on the phone all night and all morning."

"What now?"

"Those damn sharks! I told you that was too much on top of the airplane crash last week. She can't take much more of it."

"Hold it a minute, Johnny," Herb said. "Let's finish off the next three girls and then talk." He pressed a button on the arm of his chair and the room beyond the screen took their attention again.

This time the girl was slightly less beautiful, shorter, a dimply sort of brunette with laughing blue eyes and an upturned nose. John liked her. He adjusted his helmet and felt with her.

She was excited; the audition always excited them. There was some fear and nervousness, not too much. Curious about how the audition would go, probably. The wild young man ran into the room, and her face paled. Nothing else changed. Her nervousness increased, not uncomfortably. When he grabbed her, the only emotion she registered was the nervousness.

"Cut," Herb said.

The next girl was also brunette, with gorgeously elongated legs. She was very cool, a real professional. Her mobile face reflected the range

of emotions to be expected as the scene played through again, but nothing inside her was touched. She was a million miles away from it all.

The next one caught John with a slam. She entered the room slowly, looking about with curiosity, nervous, as they all were. She was younger than the other girls, less poised. She had pale gold hair piled in an elaborate mound of waves on top of her head. Her eyes were brown, her skin nicely tanned. When the man entered, her emotion changed quickly to fear, then to terror. John didn't know when he closed his eyes. He was the girl, filled with unspeakable terror; his heart pounded, adrenalin pumped into his system; he wanted to scream but could not. From the dim unreachable depths of his psyche there came something else, in waves, so mixed with terror that the two merged and became one emotion that pulsed and throbbed and demanded. With a jerk he opened his eyes and stared at the window. The girl had been thrown down to one of the couches, and the man was kneeling on the floor beside her, his hands playing over her bare body, his face pressed against her skin.

"Cut!" Herb said. His voice was shaken. "Hire her," he said. The man rose, glanced at the girl, sobbing now, and then quickly bent over and kissed her cheek. Her sobs increased. Her golden

hair was down, framing her face; she looked like a child. John tore off the helmet. He was perspiring.

Herb got up, turned on the lights in the room, and the window blanked out, blending with the wall. He didn't look at John. When he wiped his face, his hand was shaking. He rammed it in his pocket.

"When did you start auditions like that?" John asked, after a few moments of silence.

"Couple of months ago. I told you about it. Hell, we had to, Johnny. That's the six hundred nineteenth girl we've tried out! Six hundred nineteen! All phonies but one! Dead from the neck up. Do you have any idea how long it was taking us to find that out? Hours for each one. Now it's a matter of minutes."

John Lewisohn sighed. He knew. He had suggested it, actually, when he had said, "Find a basic anxiety situation for the test." He hadn't wanted to know what Herb had come up with.

He said, "Okay, but she's only a kid. What about her parents, legal rights, all that?"

"We'll fix it. Don't worry. What about Anne?"

"She's called me five times since yesterday. The sharks were too much. She wants to see us, both of us, this afternoon."

"You're kidding! I can't leave here now!"

"Nope. Kidding I'm not. She says no plug-up if we don't show. She'll take pills and sleep until we get there."

"Good Lord! She wouldn't dare!"

"I've booked seats. We take off at twelve thirty-five." They stared at one another silently for another moment, then Herb shrugged. He was a short man, not heavy but solid. John was over six feet, muscular, with a temper that he knew he had to control. Others suspected that when he did let it go, there would be bodies lying around afterward, but he controlled it.

Once it had been a physical act, an effort of body and will to master that temper; now it was done so automatically that he couldn't recall occasions when it even threatened to flare anymore.

"Look, Johnny, when we see Anne, let me handle it. Right? I'll make it short."

"What are you going to do?"

"Give her an earful. If she's going to start pulling temperament on me, I'll slap her down so hard she'll bounce a week." He grinned. "She's had it all her way up to now. She knew there wasn't a replacement if she got bitchy. Let her try it now. Just let her try." Herb was pacing back and forth with quick, jerky steps.

John realized with a shock that he hated the

stocky, red-faced man. The feeling was new; it was almost as if he could taste the hatred he felt, and the taste was unfamiliar and pleasant.

Herb stopped pacing and stared at him for a moment. "Why'd she call you? Why does she want you down, too? She knows you're not mixed up with this end of it."

"She knows I'm a full partner, anyway," John said.

"Yeah, but that's not it." Herb's face twisted in a grin. "She thinks you're still hot for her, doesn't she? She knows you tumbled once, in the beginning, when you were working on her, getting the gimmick working right." The grin reflected no humor then. "Is she right, Johnny, baby? Is that it?"

"We made a deal," John said. "You run your end, I run mine. She wants me along because she doesn't trust you, or believe anything you tell her anymore. She wants a witness."

"Yeah, Johnny. But you be sure you remember our agreement." Suddenly Herb laughed. "You know what it was like, Johnny, seeing you and her? Like a flame trying to snuggle up to an icicle."

At three thirty they were in Anne's suite in the Skyline Hotel in Grand Bahama. Herb had a

reservation to fly back to New York on the 6 P.M. flight. Anne would not be off until four, so they made themselves comfortable in her rooms and waited. Herb turned her screen on, offered a helmet to John, who shook his head, and they both seated themselves. John watched the screen for several minutes; then he, too, put on a helmet.

Anne was looking at the waves far out at sea where they were long, green, undulating; then she brought her gaze in closer, to the blue-green and quick seas, and finally in to where they stumbled on the sandbars, breaking into foam that looked solid enough to walk on. She was peaceful, swaying with the motion of the boat, the sun hot on her back, the fishing rod heavy in her hands. It was like being an indolent animal at peace with its world, at home in the world, being one with it. After a few seconds she put down the rod and turned, looking at a tall smiling man in swimming trunks. He held out his hand and she took it. They entered the cabin of the boat where drinks were waiting. Her mood of serenity and happiness ended abruptly, to be replaced by shocked disbelief, and a start of fear.

"What the hell . . . ?" John muttered, adjusting the audio. You seldom needed audio when Anne was on.

". . . Captain Brothers had to let them go. After all, they've done nothing yet—" the man was saying soberly.

"But why do you think they'll try to rob me?"

"Who else is here with a million dollars' worth of jewels?"

John turned it off and said, "You're a fool! You can't get away with something like that!"

Herb stood up and crossed to the window wall that was open to the stretch of glistening blue ocean beyond the brilliant white beaches. "You know what every woman wants? To own something worth stealing." He chuckled, a sound without mirth. "Among other things, that is. They want to be roughed up once or twice, and forced to kneel. . . . Our new psychologist is pretty good, you know? Hasn't steered us wrong yet. Anne might kick some, but it'll go over great."

"She won't stand for an actual robbery." Louder, emphatically, he added, "I won't stand for that."

"We can dub it," Herb said. "That's all we need, Johnny, plant the idea, and then dub the rest."

John stared at his back. He wanted to believe that. He needed to believe it. His voice was calm when he said, "It didn't start like this, Herb. What happened?"

Herb turned then. His face was dark against the

glare of light behind him. "Okay, Johnny, it didn't start like this. Things accelerate, that's all. You thought of a gimmick, and the way we planned it, it sounded great, but it didn't last. We gave them the feeling of gambling, or learning to ski, of automobile racing, everything we could dream up, and it wasn't enough. How many times can you take the first ski jump of your life? After a while you want new thrills, you know? For you it's been great, hasn't it? You bought yourself a shiny new lab and closed the door. You bought yourself time and equipment and when things didn't go right, you could toss it out and start over, and nobody gave a damn. Think of what it's been like for me, kid! I gotta keep coming up with something new, something that'll give Anne a jolt and through her all those nice little people who aren't even alive unless they're plugged in. You think it's been easy? Anne was a green kid. For her everything was new and exciting, but it isn't like that now, boy. You better believe it is *not* like that now. You know what she told me last month? She's sick and tired of men. Our little hot-box Annie! Tired of men!"

John crossed to him and pulled him around toward the light. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why, Johnny? What would you have done that I didn't do? *I* looked harder for the right guy. What

would you do for a new thrill for her? I worked for them, kid. Right from the start you said for me to leave you alone. Okay. I left you alone. You ever read any of the memos I sent? You initialed them, kiddo. Everything that's been done, we both signed. Don't give me any of that why didn't I tell you stuff. It won't work!" His face was ugly red and a vein bulged in his neck. John wondered if he had high blood pressure, if he would die of a stroke during one of his flash rages.

John left him at the window. He had read the memos. Herb was right; all he had wanted was to be left alone. It had been his idea; after twelve years of work in a laboratory on prototypes he had shown his—gimmick—to Herb Javits. Herb had been one of the biggest producers on television then; now he was the biggest producer in the world.

The gimmick was simple enough. A person fitted with electrodes in his brain could transmit his emotions, which in turn could be broadcast and picked up by the helmets to be felt by the audience. No words, or thoughts went out, only basic emotions—fear, love, anger, hatred . . . That, tied in with a camera showing what the person saw, with a voice dubbed in, and you were the person having the experience, with one important difference—you could turn it off if it

got to be too much. The "actor" couldn't. A simple gimmick. You didn't really need the camera and the sound track; many users never turned them on at all, but let their own imaginations fill in the emotional broadcast.

The helmets were not sold, only leased or rented after a short, easy fitting session. A year's lease cost fifty dollars, and there were over thirty-seven million subscribers. Herb had created his own network when the demand for more hours squeezed him out of regular television. From a one-hour weekly show, it had gone to one hour nightly, and now it was on the air eight hours a day live, with another eight hours of taped programming.

What had started out as A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ANNE BEAUMONT was now a life in the life of Anne Beaumont, and the audience was insatiable.

Anne came in then, surrounded by the throng of hangers-on that mobbed her daily—hairdressers, masseurs, fitters, script men . . . She looked tired. She waved the crowd out when she saw John and Herb were there. "Hello, John," she said, "Herb."

"Anne, baby, you're looking great!" Herb said. He took her in his arms and kissed her solidly. She stood still, her hands at her sides.

She was tall, very slender, with wheat-colored hair and gray eyes. Her cheekbones were wide and high, her mouth firm and almost too large. Against her deep red-gold suntan her teeth looked whiter than John remembered. Although too firm and strong ever to be thought of as pretty, she was a very beautiful woman. After Herb released her, she turned to John, hesitated only a moment, then extended a slim, sun-browned hand. It was cool and dry in his.

"How have you been, John? It's been a long time."

He was very glad she didn't kiss him, or call him darling. She smiled only slightly and gently removed her hand from his. He moved to the bar as she turned to Herb.

"I'm through, Herb." Her voice was too quiet. She accepted a whiskey sour from John, but kept her gaze on Herb.

"What's the matter, honey? I was just watching you, baby. You were great today, like always. You've still got it, kid. It's coming through like always."

"What about this robbery? You must be out of your mind . . ."

"Yeah, that. Listen, Anne baby, I swear to you I don't know a thing about it. Laughton must have been giving you the straight goods on that. You

know we agreed that the rest of this week you just have a good time, remember? That comes over too, baby. When you have a good time and relax, thirty-seven million people are enjoying life and relaxing. That's good. They can't be stimulated all the time. They like the variety." Wordlessly John held out a glass, scotch and water. Herb took it without looking.

Anne was watching him coldly. Suddenly she laughed. It was a cynical, bitter sound. "You're not a damn fool, Herb. Don't try to act like one." She sipped her drink again, staring at him over the rim of the glass. "I'm warning you, if anyone shows up here to rob me, I'm going to treat him like a real burglar. I bought a gun after today's broadcast, and I learned how to shoot when I was ten. I still know how. I'll kill him, Herb, whoever it is."

"Baby," Herb started, but she cut him short.

"And this is my last week. As of Saturday, I'm through."

"You can't do that, Anne," Herb said. John watched him closely, searching for a sign of weakness; he saw nothing. Herb exuded confidence. "Look around, Anne, at this room, your clothes, everything. . . . You are the richest woman in the world, having the time of your life, able to go anywhere, do anything . . ."

"While the whole world watches—"

"So what? It doesn't stop you, does it?" Herb started to pace, his steps jerky and quick. "You knew that when you signed the contract. You're a rare girl, Anne, beautiful, emotional, intelligent. Think of all those women who've got nothing but you. If you quit them, what do they do? Die? They might, you know. For the first time in their lives they're able to feel like they're living. You're giving them what no one ever did before, what was only hinted at in books and films in the old days. Suddenly they know what it feels like to face excitement, to experience love, to feel contented and peaceful. Think of them, Anne, empty, with nothing in their lives but you, what you're able to give them. Thirty-seven million drabs, Anne, who never felt anything but boredom and frustration until you gave them life. What do they have? Work, kids, bills. You've given them the world, baby! Without you they wouldn't even want to live anymore."

She wasn't listening. Almost dreamily she said, "I talked to my lawyers, Herb, and the contract is meaningless. You've already broken it over and over. I agreed to learn a lot of new things. I did. My God! I've climbed mountains, hunted lions, learned to ski and water-ski, but now you want me to die a little bit each week . . . That airplane

crash, not bad, just enough to terrify me. Then the sharks. I really do think it was having sharks brought in when I was skiing that did it, Herb. You see, you will kill me. It will happen, and you won't be able to top it, Herb. Not ever."

There was a hard, waiting silence following her words. *No!* John shouted soundlessly. He was looking at Herb. He had stopped pacing when she started to talk. Something flicked across his face—surprise, fear, something not readily identifiable. Then his face went blank and he raised his glass and finished the scotch and water, replacing the glass on the bar. When he turned again, he was smiling with disbelief.

"What's really bugging you, Anne? There have been plants before. You knew about them. Those lions didn't just happen by, you know. And the avalanche needed a nudge from someone. You know that. What else is bugging you?"

"I'm in love, Herb."

Herb waved that aside impatiently. "Have you ever watched your own show, Anne?" She shook her head. "I thought not. So you wouldn't know about the expansion that took place last month, after we planted that new transmitter in your head. Johnny boy's been busy, Anne. You know these scientist types, never satisfied, always improving, changing. Where's the camera, Anne?

Do you ever know where it is anymore? Have you even seen a camera in the past couple of weeks, or a recorder of any sort? You have not, and you won't again. You're on now, honey." His voice was quite low, amused almost. "In fact the only time you aren't on is when you're sleeping. I know you're in love. I know who he is. I know how he makes you feel. I even know how much money he makes a week. I should know, Anne baby. I pay him." He had come closer to her with each word, finishing with his face only inches from hers. He didn't have a chance to duck the flashing slap that jerked his head around, and before either of them realized it, he had hit her back, knocking her into a chair.

The silence grew, became something ugly and heavy, as if words were being born and dying without utterance because they were too brutal for the human spirit to bear. There was a spot of blood on Herb's mouth where Anne's diamond ring had cut him. He touched it and looked at his finger. "It's all being taped now, honey, even this," he said. He turned his back on her and went to the bar.

There was a large red print on her cheek. Her gray eyes had turned black with rage.

"Honey, relax," Herb said after a moment. "It won't make any difference to you, in what you do,

or anything like that. You know we can't use most of the stuff, but it gives the editors a bigger variety to pick from. It was getting to the point where most of the interesting stuff was going on after you were off. Like buying the gun. That's great stuff there, baby. You weren't blanketing a single thing, and it'll all come through like pure gold." He finished mixing his drink, tasted it, and then swallowed half of it. "How many women have to go out and buy a gun to protect themselves? Think of them all, feeling that gun, feeling the things you felt when you picked it up, looked at it . . ."

"How long have you been tuning in all the time?" she asked. John felt a stirring along his spine, a tingle of excitement. He knew what was going out over the miniature transmitter, the rising crests of emotion she was feeling. Only a trace of them showed on her smooth face, but the raging interior torment was being recorded faithfully. Her quiet voice and quiet body were lies; the tapes never lied.

Herb felt it too. He put his glass down and went to her, kneeling by the chair, taking her hand in both of his. "Anne, please, don't be that angry with me. I was desperate for new material. When Johnny got this last wrinkle out, and we knew we could record around the clock, we had to try it, and it wouldn't have been any good if you'd known.

That's no way to test anything. You knew we were planting the transmitter. . . ."

"How long?"

"Not quite a month."

"And Stuart? He's one of your men? He is transmitting also? You hired him to . . . to make love to me? Is that right?"

Herb nodded. She pulled her hand free and averted her face. He got up then and went to the window. "But what difference does it make?" he shouted. "If I introduced the two of you at a party, you wouldn't think anything of it. What difference if I did it this way? I knew you'd like each other. He's bright, like you, likes the same sort of things you do. Comes from a poor family, like yours . . . Everything said you'd get along."

"Oh, yes," she said almost absently. "We get along." She was feeling in her hair, her fingers searching for the scars.

"It's all healed by now," John said. She looked at him as if she had forgotten he was there.

"I'll find a surgeon," she said, standing up, her fingers white on her glass. "A brain surgeon—"

"It's a new process," John said slowly. "It would be dangerous to go in after them."

She looked at him for a long time. "Dangerous?"

He nodded.

"You could take it back out."

He remembered the beginning, how he had quieted her fear of the electrodes and the wires. Her fear was that of a child for the unknown and the unknowable. Time and again he had proved to her that she could trust him, that he wouldn't lie to her. He hadn't lied to her, then. There was the same trust in her eyes, the same unshakable faith. She would believe him. She would accept without question whatever he said. Herb had called him an icicle, but that was wrong. An icicle would have melted in her fires. More like a stalactite, shaped by centuries of civilization, layer by layer he had been formed until he had forgotten how to bend, forgotten how to find release for the stirrings he felt somewhere in the hollow, rigid core of himself. She had tried and, frustrated, she had turned from him, hurt, but unable not to trust one she had loved. Now she waited. He could free her, and lose her again, this time irrevocably. Or he could hold her as long as she lived.

Her lovely gray eyes were shadowed with fear, and the trust that he had given to her. Slowly he shook his head.

"I can't," he said. "No one can."

"I see," she murmured, the black filling her eyes. "I'd die, wouldn't I? Then you'd have a

lovely sequence, wouldn't you, Herb?" She swung around, away from John. "You'd have to fake the story line, of course, but you are so good at that. An accident, emergency brain surgery needed, everything I feel going out to the poor little drabs who never will have brain surgery done. It's very good," she said admiringly. Her eyes were black. "In fact, anything I do from now on, you'll use, won't you? If I kill you, that will simply be material for your editors to pick over. Trial, prison, very dramatic . . . On the other hand, if I kill myself . . ."

John felt chilled; a cold, hard weight seemed to be filling him. Herb laughed. "The story line will be something like this," he said. "Anne has fallen in love with a stranger, deeply, sincerely in love with him. Everyone knows how deep that love is, they've all felt it, too, you know. She finds him raping a child, a lovely little girl in her early teens. Stuart tells her they're through. He loves the little nymphet. In a passion she kills herself. You are broadcasting a real storm of passion, right now, aren't you, honey? Never mind, when I run through this scene, I'll find out." She hurled her glass at him, ice cubes and orange slices flying across the room. Herb ducked, grinning.

"That's awfully good, baby. Corny, but after all, they can't get too much corn, can they? They'll

love it, after they get over the shock of losing you. And they will get over it, you know. They always do. Wonder if it's true about what happens to someone experiencing a violent death?" Anne's teeth bit down on her lip, and slowly she sat down again, her eyes closed tight. Herb watched her for a moment, then said, even more cheerfully, "We've got the kid already. If you give them a death, you've got to give them a new life. Finish one with a bang. Start one with a bang. We'll name the kid Cindy, a real Cinderella story after that. They'll love her, too."

Anne opened her eyes, black, dulled now; she was so full of tension that John felt his own muscles contract. He wondered if he would be able to stand the tape she was transmitting. A wave of excitement swept him and he knew he would play it all, feel it all, the incredibly contained rage, fear, the horror of giving a death to them to gloat over, and finally, anguish. He would know it all. Watching Anne, he wished she would break now. She didn't. She stood up stiffly, her back rigid, a muscle hard and ridged in her jaw. Her voice was flat when she said, "Stuart is due in half an hour. I have to dress." She left them without looking back.

Herb winked at John and motioned toward the door. "Want to take me to the plane, kid?" In the

cab he said, "Stick close to her for a couple of days, Johnny. There might be an even bigger reaction later when she really understands just how hooked she is." He chuckled again. "By God! It's a good thing she trusts you, Johnny boy!"

As they waited in the chrome and marble terminal for the liner to unload its passengers, John said, "Do you think she'll be any good after this?"

"She can't help herself. She's too life-oriented to deliberately choose to die. She's like a jungle inside, raw, wild, untouched by that smooth layer of civilization she shows on the outside. It's a thin layer, kid, real thin. She'll fight to stay alive. She'll become more wary, more alert to danger, more excited and exciting . . . She'll really go to pieces when he touches her tonight. She's primed real good. Might even have to do some editing, tone it down a little." His voice was very happy. "He touches her where she lives, and she reacts. A real wild one. She's one; the new kid's one; Stuart . . . They're few and far between, Johnny. It's up to us to find them. God knows we're going to need all of them we can get." His expression became thoughful and withdrawn. "You know, that really wasn't such a bad idea of mine about rape and the kid. Who ever dreamed we'd get that

kind of a reaction from her? With the right sort of buildup . . ." He had to run to catch his plane.

John hurried back to the hotel, to be near Anne if she needed him. But he hoped she would leave him alone. His fingers shook as he turned on his screen; suddenly he had a clear memory of the child who had wept, and he hoped Stuart would hurt Anne just a little. The tremor in his fingers increased; Stuart was on from six until twelve, and he already had missed almost an hour of the show. He adjusted the helmet and sank back into a deep chair. He left the audio off, letting his own words form, letting his own thoughts fill in the spaces.

Anne was leaning toward him, sparkling champagne raised to her lips, her eyes large and soft. She was speaking, talking to him, John, calling him by name. He felt a tingle start somewhere deep inside him, and his glance was lowered to rest on her tanned hand in his, sending electricity through him. Her hand trembled when he ran his fingers up her palm, to her wrist where a blue vein throbbed. The slight throb became a pounding that grew, and when he looked again into her eyes, they were dark and very deep. They danced and he felt her body against his, yielding, pleading. The room darkened and she was an outline against the window, her gown floating

down about her. The darkness grew denser, or he closed his eyes, and this time when her body pressed against his, there was nothing between them, and the pounding was everywhere.

In the deep chair, with the helmet on his head, John's hands clenched, opened, clenched, again and again.

Poems by Wilhelm

Alternatives

She could diet, or get fat,
give up smoking: things like that
might cause a mild diversion.
She shudders with aversion.

She could get a job and work,
or pretend to go berserk,
and break everything in sight.
There are times she fears she might.

She considers an affair
but she knows she doesn't care
enough to try
to find a safe and willing guy.

She would, if she were able,
proclaim at the breakfast table,
"I've discovered that I'm gay!
Oh, I'm leaving, by the way."

She could have an operation
or plan a celebration
of a Worthwhile Cause or two.
There must be something she can do.

She could have another baby
or just get one started maybe
and abort it. Or tonight
she could simply pick a fight.

Her greatest fear and dread
is that if she were dead
they wouldn't notice it at all.
She could repaint a wall.

She could go out for a drive
and for a moment come alive
to feel the night wind's chill
as she cries, flying off a hill.

Four Seasons

She runs through childhood
rushing toward the distant land
where she will wear heels
and lipstick and bras.
She runs in the rain, and laughs.
The rain on her skin is sensual,
as is the sun, and any touch.
She delights in opening flowers
and new grass and never before
seen stars and clouds.
She is kissed, and knows
an innocent passion.
There is a man—it doesn't matter who;
any man will do
who desires her enough.

"How the heat oppresses me," she says,
but doesn't mean it. She lies
under the sun for hours
and swims, or plays croquet, and sees
a movie once a week. Soon they'll buy

another house, near a good school,
with central A.C. and a plastic pool
and take the kids to Disneyland.
She's wrapped herself in clubs
and P.T.A., car pools and coffees.
"How the heat oppresses me," she says.

She feels the need to hurry, but can't
think where to go. Since the last
graduation, it's been so empty in
the house. Her man isn't the man
of ten years ago, she doesn't think,
but often feels in doubt
about his identity or her own.
She rakes the fallen leaves and notes:
"They change color coming down."
There's no one she can tell.
When her make-up is off, and she's
just washed her hair, and looks
in the glass, she knows she has to hurry,
and doesn't know where.

"The boy used to charge eight dollars
to shovel the snow. We had a long walk,"
she says. A man on a tractor
clears the walks here and spreads salt
on the ice. She watches from her third
floor room. "It was a nice house,"

she says nodding. There's no one to hear,
no one to answer. "Where did it all go?"
She sits by the window and watches the snow.

No One Listens

No one listens if we scream,
so I sing softly, gently, in a lullaby hush:
Men are dying. (softly, softly)
Skeletal hands reach
and grasp nothing. (quietly, quietly)

The land cracks, chasms crisscross
in a pleasing pattern. (cry out softly)
Women with great
blank eyes stare
into a world I cannot see. (quietly, quietly)

What should be shrieked in an awful piercing voice
will be murmured:
The children's faces
are faces of saints;
their bodies are monstrous. (softly, softly)

Hear it in your bones, a blare booming
over the world, as I whisper:
The earth doesn't care.

God doesn't care.
Nobody cares. (gently, gently)

Now the stars should shake
with a universal reverberation. Let it be a sigh:
Why? Why was man
made aware
of his suffering
when other animals just die?

The Eagle

The dead tree flies an eagle on the wind,
Then steadily reels it in:
Dip, sway, soar, rise,
All the time closer.
To the left, to the right,
Now too low, now too high,
But closer.
From nothing, to a speck
That could be a cloud,
To a being coming home,
It takes shape:
Sun on snow, the head,
Great wings without a waver,
White fan as graceful
And delicate as a black one
In a pale practiced hand.
From the tree's highest crotch,
From a nest of branches, sticks, twigs, moss,
Elaborate skyscraper room,
A silent summons was sent.
Now the dead tree reels the eagle home.

This book was designed by D. Christine Benders, set in 11 point Baskerville by Chip Hitchcock and Leslie Turek at Typo-Tech Studios, with additional assistance from Donald E. Eastlake III and George Flynn. It was printed on 60 lb. Lockhaven Cream by the Arcata Book Group, Hanover, Massachusetts.